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“BRIDGE AND PROJECT MANAGEMENT”

Is there any sense in the above title? Looks like it is when you listen to some well-known personalities like Bill Gates or Warren Buffet.

"The approach and strategies are very similar in that you gather all the information you can and then keep adding to that base of information as things develop. You do whatever the probabilities indicated based on the knowledge that you have at that time, but you are always willing to modify your behaviour or your approach as you get new information. In bridge, you behave in a way that gets the best from your partner. And in business, you behave in the way that gets the best from your managers and your employees" said Warren Buffet to show a similarity of bridge and business.

„Anybody who is good at bridge is going to be great at a lot of things” – that's what we can find at EBL web page and that's what Bill Gates said.

When looking at Wall Street Sharks lots of them are bridge players as well. So, there must be something in terms of skills that connects plying bridge and business. Business Insider reports:

“There’s a reason, however, why the best bridge players in the country are almost all investors. Business Insider deputy editor and bridge enthusiast Gus Lubin notes: “Bridge is a complex card game that fits the analytic side of finance, as poker appeals to instincts.”

That’s why I wasn't surprised when professor Marek Wirkus from Faculty of Economy and Management in the Gdańsk University of Technology asked me to make a presentation „Bridge and Agile Project Management” at their Conference. I had no idea what’s that but uncle Google showed me the way. I studied „Agile Manifest” and without going here into details this kind of project management, different from standard methods, needs many skills our game may give to brige playing people.

Every single board creates two projects one for each side. That’s clear and simple for us, bridge players.

The first stage of creation it's bidding where partners have to cooperate, calculate the profitability (sometimes losing is profitable) of their declarations under the condition of incomplete information. Making any decision you have to take responsibility for the result of the pair and the team. It's probably more difficult than in real life when constructing any project. If one has the skills which you get when playing bridge, life will be far easier for him in real projects constructing. The effect of this first stage are two projects:

- declaring side with one manager (declarer) trying to make the contract
- defenders, with two cooperating managers, trying to disenable making the Contract.

Next stage comes when the first lead appears, both sides have to make their plans: how to make the contract (declarer) and how to defeat it (defenders). More information is available for both sides but still lots of them stay unknown.

In real life, projects at that stage, seem to be based on complete information. The project manager can face some unexpected problems and has to be ready to solve them. All he needs in such a case is to predict the need for modification at startup. Still there are no random aspects to consider.

This skill, predicting random changes knowing only their probabilities, you can easily get practising bridge.

When playing bridge both declarer and defenders have to be ready to modify their strategy due to incoming information during play. Probability of being forced to change strategy somewhere in the middle of the project is much higher than in real life ones and projects modification seems more difficult. If you are used to this kind of unexpected situations and you know how to make necessary changes in a strategy you should be able to manage it.

What is fascinating for Warren Buffet in playing bridge is the necessity of processing a string of incoming information. Almost every board creates a string of problems to be solved.

Very useful in real life is reasoning from what has happened as well as from what doesn't happen. Solving bridge problems, you have to have this skill and practising you get it sooner or later.

Another important factor, important not only in the game of bridge, is risk management. Playing bridge competitions, where one or more players have to solve the same problem (cards are being prepared this way), you have to predict what others will do and follow them or take a risky decision. How risky will you take comes from various calculations you have to make.

Cooperation in pair and/or in a team requires mutual trust and understanding, the same as in team implementing the project in real life.

If you review the skills indicated above, it became clear why both Gates and Buffet play bridge and why they presented opinions quoted at the beginning of the text. Of course, you have to learn the first basic level of the game and practice but nothing in life comes automatically. The sooner you start, the sooner you get results and make use of these skills.

We recommend first bridge lessons in primary schools and at the latest at University. For „Economy and Management” studies, from the same reasons, seem to bring good effects if you include the game of bridge in the study program.

In case you are not convinced enough go back to quoted above Gates advise and make use of it.